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Nesting of the Western Golden-crowned Kinglet in Western Washington

BY J. H. BOWLES

ON the 19th of May, 1902, my attention was attracted to a dark spot on the under side of a fir limb at an elevation of forty feet above the ground. It was near the top of a young tree about five feet from the trunk, and my disappointment may be better imagined than described when I discovered it to be a ball of moss and feathers, open at the top and containing nine newly hatched young of *Regulus satrapa olivaceus*. This being my first positive breeding record for this bird my oological ambition became centered on securing a nest with eggs, and the season of 1903 was largely devoted to that purpose greatly to the neglect of other much deserving species. Time and again I thought I had succeeded, but only to find the usual cluster of our exceedingly common hanging moss, or at best a decoy nest, for these kinglets are nearly as fond of building extra nests as are so many of the wren family.

To give the readers of THE CONDOR an idea of the difficulties of the undertaking before me, a description of the nesting grounds is necessary. While the kinglets are not particularly rare, the localities where they may be found are the immense stretches of great firs that cover large portions of our dry prairie country. The only intimation, as a rule, of their presence is their faint squealing call-note that comes from somewhere high overhead in the dense foliage, the birds themselves being so small that it is almost an impossibility to get a sight of them. With this discouraging prospect I started in on the present season of 1904, and my reward came most unexpectedly, on the evening of April 25. My brother and I were returning from a successful trip after nests of the Audubon warbler, having taken two handsome sets of four, and were strolling along the edge of a stretch of fir timber several square miles in extent. Kinglets being in my mind as usual, my attention was drawn to a spot among the fir branches which, even in the growing dusk, looked a trifle different from any of the surroundings. It proved to be a most promising looking kinglet nest, but, being twenty feet from the ground and fifteen feet out under an immense branch, making a close examination was impossible. As there were no birds around we decided it was the customary decoy and so left it, but after two days had passed the uncertainty became too much for our nerves and we again visited it, armed this time with a hundred feet of rope. Curiously enough it was impossible to see the nest in the bright sunlight until we were directly under it, so well did it harmonize in coloring with its surroundings, although in the evening it was faintly discernable at a distance of sixty feet. When we arrived within a short distance our hopes rose a trifle to see a small gray object leave the vicinity of the nest and disappear like a flash in the surrounding maze of branches. Climbing up the tree some forty feet above the nest my brother securely fastened one end of the rope, and, coming down to a level with the nest, attached the rope chair and I, on the ground, pulled him out to the nest. Seldom has anything been more welcome to me than when he called down, "It's full of eggs." We stayed around the tree for an hour, during which time the male *Regulus* was extremely shy, but the female after a while became accustomed to us and would return and get into the nest when my brother was within three feet of it. The nest, like all the others I have seen, was most insecurely fastened among the small needle-covered twigs about three inches under the limb. It is an exceedingly bulky structure, considering the size of the bird, measuring externally $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches in depth by 16 inches in circumference. The cavity is small though

rather more shallow than might be expected, being a scant two inches deep by one and three-quarter inches wide. In construction the materials used form a very attractive conglomeration of various kinds of green mosses, feathers and hair, heavily lined with small downy feathers and squirrel and rabbit hair.

The eggs, which are eight in number, are of a subdued cream-white ground color with the faintest suggestion of a cloud of tiny brown spots around the larger end. In measurement there is scarcely any variation, the average being .57 by .43 inches. They were neatly placed in the nest, being arranged in a single layer extending up the sides of the nest so the body of the bird fitted in their midst.

My second occupied nest for this year was found on the third of June in much the same kind of location as the first one. Its large size convinced me that it was not a decoy and, supposing of course the young had long since left, I climbed the



NEST OF WESTERN GOLDEN-CROWNED KINGLET

tree with the purpose of cutting off the limb and securing the nest as a specimen. I had my knife out when the bird suddenly appeared and, on seeing me darted away so quickly that I was only able to see that she held something in her bill. Young ones, thought I in disgust, so left the nest and did not again visit it until June 17, this time again with my brother and the rope in case of an addled egg. As we were making preparations down below one of the birds appeared with a small green worm in its mouth and flew to the nest and stayed there. This convinced us that the nest had contained eggs when I first found it, but there was still the possibility of the addled egg so my brother started up with the rope to make the best of a bad mistake. Such was my annoyance that I threw a dead stick up close to the nest, causing two birds to flutter out of it. I supposed them to be the old one just seen and a full grown young one, so paid no further attention to them being busy with my end of the rope. However it is the unexpected

that often happens and luck was again with us to an unusual extent, for the nest contained nine beautiful eggs varying from fresh to about half incubated. The birds were somewhat more shy than those in the case of the first nest, never coming nearer than six feet but squeaking continually.

This nest closely resembles the first one, but is a trifle larger, measuring sixteen and a half inches in circumference by four inches in depth. The inner dimensions, however, are slightly smaller, measuring one and a half by one and a half inches. It was suspended from the lower side of the branch, most insecurely as usual, fifteen feet from the trunk of the tree and eighteen feet from the ground. The eggs are quite different in coloring from those of the first set, the ground being a perceptible reddish white strongly clouded about the larger ends with fine red-brown dots. Several have a fine line of the same color, as if made with a pen. They are very slightly larger than the first set, measuring .60 by .42 inches.

The only other occupied nest found was situated fifty feet up in a fir tree in the middle of a large grove. In size and construction it is similar to the two above mentioned, but the young had only recently vacated it. Curiously enough they had scarcely damaged it at all.

To try to arrive at any definite conclusions concerning the nesting habits of these birds would be hardly wise, owing to lack of sufficient data, but let us hope to hear from others on the subject. However, it seems extremely likely that my nests with eggs were unusually low ones, the fifty foot one being nearer the average as the birds are almost always high up in the trees. This seems the more probable since both my brother and I had found nests that had fallen to the ground that could not have come from lower than sixty feet, and possibly were built at a much greater height.

That they build a great many decoy nests is beyond a doubt. Indeed I have found two in one tree. I watched a bird working on one of these nests in the middle of July but could find no trace of an occupied nest in the vicinity. These extra nests are built of the same material as the occupied nests, but are not so neat in their construction nor are they so large.

The texture of the egg shell is the most delicate that I have ever seen, not even excepting eggs of the hummers, the drill sinking into the shell at the slightest touch. In spite of such a nerve-destroying process, however, I am happy to say that all seventeen of the eggs are prepared in perfect condition.

I feel positive that two broods are reared in a season, on account of the dates of my nests as well as owing to the fact that old birds with their troops of young may be seen at intervals between the middle of May and the first of July.

Tacoma, Washington.

A Set of Abnormally Large Eggs of the Golden Eagle

BY C. S. SHARP

A FEW miles west of the Escondido Valley, and forming one of the outlets to the coast, is a picturesque canyon, officially known, I believe, as Aliso Canyon; locally by every resident within a mile of it and among the unregenerate youth of this place as "Spook" Canyon, from the fact that the spiritualists of Escondido and vicinity hold an annual camp meeting in its groves. Through